



*“I think one of my pleasantest memories of Esthwaite is sitting on Oatmeal Crag on a Sunday afternoon, where there is a sort of table of rock with a dip, with the lane and fields and oak copse like in a trough below my feet, and all the little tiny fungus people singing and bobbing and dancing in the grass and under the leaves all down below, like the whistling that some people cannot hear of stray mice and bats, and I sitting up above and knowing something about them.”*

—Beatrix Potter, 1896

“Far from being purely child-centered, [Beatrix Potter’s] writings for children always share a fine balance between presenting things from a child-like point of view while at the same time periodically confronting a young audience with essentially adult examples of language and understanding. In this way young readers are both at home in her books and also conscious of traveling towards new experiences. Approaching her stories is therefore like meeting an old friend also capable from time to time of mounting the odd shock or surprise.”

—Nicholas Tucker

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## The Tale of Beatrix Potter

Beatrix Potter is best known to the world through her “little books”—the nearly two dozen children’s books she wrote and illustrated between 1901 and 1913. But this intriguing Victorian woman lived many different lives, not only as a gifted artist and story-teller, but as a naturalist, a farmer, and a conservationist who cared not only for the land but for the creatures who lived there.

Helen Beatrix Potter was born in 1866 into a wealthy, London family. Much of what we know about her early life comes from her journal, which she kept in a miniature cipher that was not decoded until after her death. She was educated by governesses and had no formal education. The Potters made annual three-month visits to Scotland and the Lake District, where Beatrix took great delight in learning about the natural world and sketching what she saw.

Beatrix sketched her pets, too, and it was her drawings of her favorite rabbit, Peter Piper, which led to *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, composed in 1893 as a letter to the son of a former governess. In 1901, after several attempts to interest a publisher, Beatrix paid to have *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* privately

Beatrix Potter is a perennial favorite of young people, and her art, her stories, and the inspiring story of her life make for an excellent learning experience. If you plan to use *The Cottage Tale Mysteries* in your classroom or library, there are a great many resources available.

The books. Each book in this series contains an extensive historical note and a full bibliography of available print resources.

Susan Wittig Albert’s website, [www.mysterypartners.com](http://www.mysterypartners.com),

printed. When the little book came to the notice of Frederick Warne Publishers, they offered to publish it.

*Peter Rabbit* was quickly followed by other books, and by 1905, there were a quarter of a million copies of her stories in print.

But in that year, Beatrix’s life took an unexpected and dramatic turn. In July, she received an offer of marriage from her editor, Norman Warne, on whose steady friendship she had come to rely. Beatrix’s parents, however, angrily opposed the marriage. Defiantly, she accepted Norman’s ring.

But tragedy struck with unexpected swiftness. Norman died only a month after their engagement, of acute leukemia. Now Beatrix knew that if she were to have a life of her own, separate from her parents, she would have to create it for herself.

It was at this point that Hill Top Farm came into Beatrix’s already quite complicated life. About the time of Norman’s death, she bought a small farm in the Lake District village of Sawrey, where she and her par-

will soon carry a teacher’s guide and links to on-line resources and activities. Watch for it!

Other websites:  
<http://wiredforbooks.org/kids.htm>. Ohio University offers all of Beatrix Potter’s books, with color pictures.

<http://www.tameside.gov.uk/corpgen1/beatrixpotter.htm>. This UK site describes Potter’s early life

<http://www.peterrabbit.co.uk>. The “official” Peter Rabbit site, sponsored by Frederick Warne, Potter’s publisher.



**Beatrix Potter’s Farm**

ents had gone on holiday.

In October, Beatrix traveled to Sawrey to inspect her new property. There, she threw herself into the Hill Top project with all the passion and dedication she gave to her books. Perhaps the challenge of dealing with the farm and making a place for herself in the village helped to divert her thoughts from her great loss.

While Beatrix was not to come to Sawrey to live for another eight years, she made frequent visits and her heart was constantly there. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that Hill Top saved her from despair. It certainly gave her a sense of new possibilities, exciting new hopes and new dreams. It is fair to say that the little farm changed the entire course of her life.



**Beatrix Potter**  
 1866-1943